

*This is the Thirty-fourth of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church*

## **The Collett Family**

### **Part I: William Collett Senior**

William Collett was rector of All Saints' Church from April 1808 until his death in September 1835. If you wonder where you have seen his name, there is a large marble memorial plaque over the door of the vestry, and there are four seats in the front row of the pews which were restored in his memory. His family came from Westerfield Manor in Suffolk, and the last Collett to live in Westerfield died there in 1802. William himself was baptised in Eyke, Suffolk on 30 November 1755 and was educated at Merton College, Oxford. Although he was only the 6<sup>th</sup> son, for some reason he was one of the major beneficiaries of his father, Anthony's, will, and so he was comfortably off. I have called him William Snr, because his only son was also called William and I shall be talking about him in a subsequent article.

### **Benefices and tithes**

Now this was a time of considerable social upheaval and a time when the Church of England was having to struggle to find a new identity. Two big issues were the enclosure of common land and the modernisation of the ancient system of paying tithes to the church. It may be as well to clarify the latter before going any further. From the early days of the church an agreed proportion of the yearly profits from farming was paid in kind to support the parish church and its clergy, but for many years money payments had often been substituted. Also the tithes were traditionally divided into "great tithes" (those on grain, hay and wood) and "small tithes" (the remainder). Now, the rector was the person who was responsible for the spiritual welfare of his parishioners, and originally it was he who received these tithes. But the benefice was often simply regarded as a valuable source of income, which could be bought and sold, and rectors were often found who were 'pluralists', having more than one benefice. Furthermore, many rectors had no desire to live in the parish and they often appointed a paid 'vicar' to do their duties. Equally, in time, many benefices came into the possession of monasteries or colleges, and they too kept the great tithes and spent the small tithes on the appointment of a vicar. Then, after the Dissolution of the Monasteries, their tithe rights were confiscated by the Crown, and then sold on to lay people. So, much church land and the associated tithes passed into lay ownership, and payment of these tithes came to be much resented. Furthermore, the growing number of Nonconformists and other dissenters resented paying tithes to an established church, over which they had no control. This resentment was steadily building up during William's time as rector and by the 1830s there were a number of quite violent protests throughout Norfolk and Suffolk.

The rules of the church were quite clear on these issues; no minister ought to hold more than one living; and for proper care of the souls of his parishioners he ought to reside in his benefice. But in practice there were dispensations and licences, and by the 1820s and 1830s nearly half of the incumbents were pluralists, and many were not residential. The record was set by one bishop who held eleven livings! And William was no exception.

### **His clerical appointments**

He was ordained deacon on 21 September 1783 and was immediately made curate of Helmley and Playford in Suffolk on a nice little stipend of £25 p.a., despite the fact that the church had fallen totally into decay. There is no evidence of any other incumbent being appointed until June 1830. Then, William was ordained priest on 6 June 1784 and appointed curate of Swanton Morley in July 1784. At that time Joshua Larwood was the rector (appointed July 1779). William could then afford to get married, and on 13 July 1784 he married Ann Carthew. I shall come back to his family shortly.

His next appointment was when he was made vicar of Surlingham, St Mary, together with St Saviour's on 14 April 1791. These churches are about half a mile apart, near Thetford. Now, William was also the patron who made the appointment, so it would appear that he must have bought the 'advowson' of this benefice. Indeed we shall see later that he appointed his son William Jnr as vicar there in October 1820. Now St Saviour's was nothing more than an ivy-covered ruin and the parish had all but disappeared from the landscape, but it generated an income for William Snr. The ruins of St Saviour's can still be seen.

The Church of England database shows that on 7 April 1808 Sir John Lombe of Great Melton appointed him rector of Swanton Morley, with the chapel of Worthing attached, and from this time on we find his signature in the parish registers.

However, he seems to have had a gift for finding derelict churches which generated a useful income for, on 27 Aug 1817, he was appointed rector of Egmere with the vicarage of Holkham attached. St Edmunds, Egmere, was originally in the patronage of Walsingham Abbey and after the Dissolution it passed to the Bacon family, but by 1602 it had been reduced to a barn. It remained in the gift of the Bacon family until 1761 when it passed to the Coke family. All that remains today is the bottom two-thirds of the tower. White's Directory for 1845 says that the parish had only 54 inhabitants. The Earl of Leicester was the lord of the manor and patron of the rectory, which was valued at £180 in 1831.

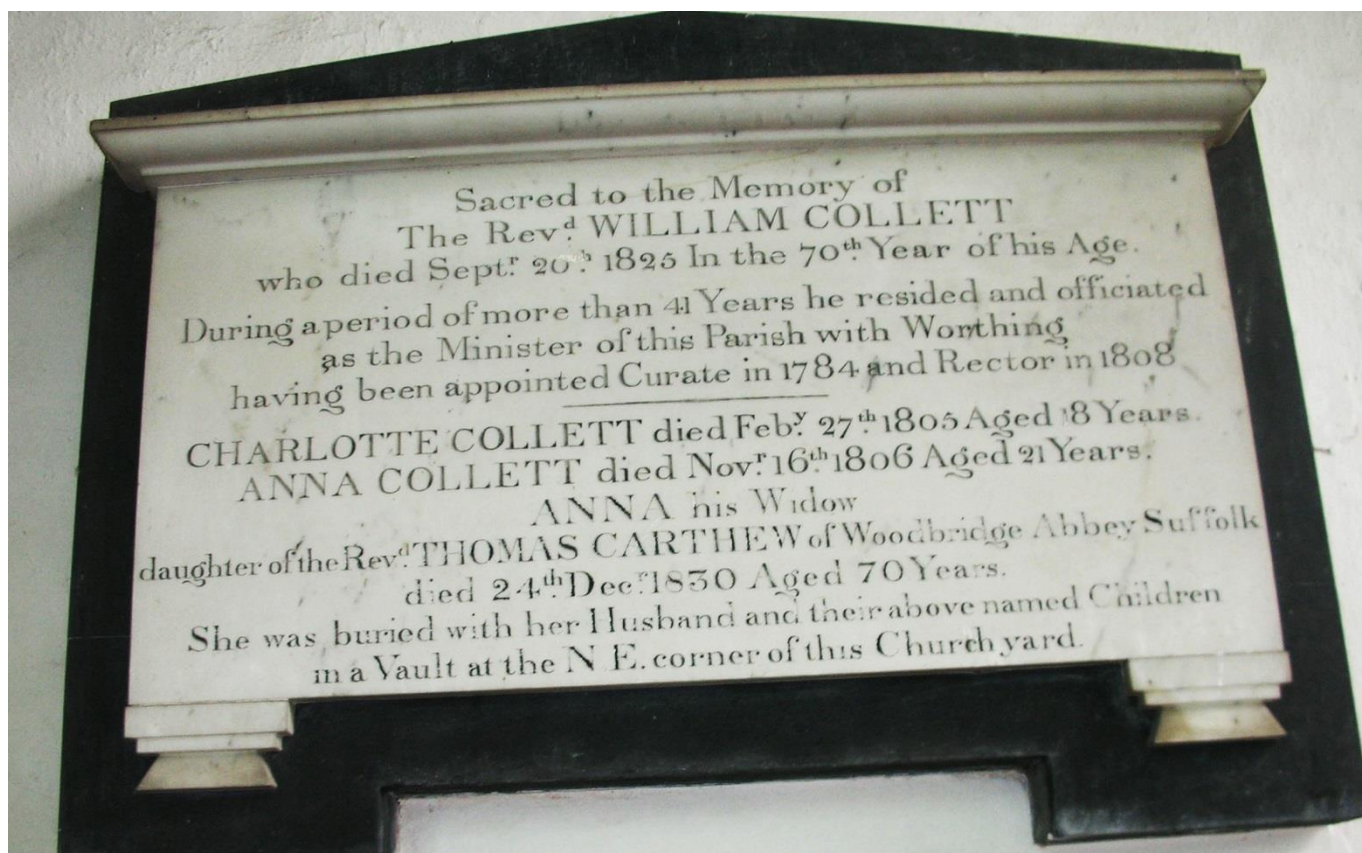
## His family

### Baptisms of his children

29 Apr 1785	Anna
28 Jan 1787	Charlotte
17 Feb 1788	Sophia
27 Feb 1789	Mary
15 Apr 1792	Frances Elizabeth
17 Aug 1796	William(This is William Jr.)

First note that Charlotte and Anna died about 19 months apart in 1805 and 1806 respectively and that, as curate, William Snr had the sad duty of performing both burial ceremonies.

Charlotte	died on 27 February 1805
Anna	died on 16 November 1806



Next time we shall look at their tombs in the grave yard